



New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services

HAZARDOUS SUBSTANCE FACT SHEET

Common Name: **DIMETHYL MERCURY**

CAS Number: 593-74-8

DOT Number: None

RTK Substance number: 0763

Date: November 1992 Revision: August 1998

HAZARD SUMMARY

- * **Dimethyl Mercury** can affect you when breathed in and by passing through your skin.
- * Skin contact can cause severe irritation and burns.
- * **Dimethyl Mercury** can severely irritate and burn the eyes.
- * Breathing **Dimethyl Mercury** can irritate the nose, throat and lungs.
- * **Dimethyl Mercury** can cause delayed, permanent brain damage and death with little or no warning. Symptoms include a "pins and needles" feeling, weakness, reduced hearing, abnormal walking, tremors and personality changes.
- * **Dimethyl Mercury** may damage the kidneys.

IDENTIFICATION

Dimethyl Mercury is a colorless liquid. It is used as a reagent and in making other chemicals.

REASON FOR CITATION

- * **Dimethyl Mercury** is on the Hazardous Substance List because it is regulated by OSHA and cited by ACGIH and NIOSH.
- * Definitions are provided on page 5.

HOW TO DETERMINE IF YOU ARE BEING EXPOSED

The New Jersey Right to Know Act requires most employers to label chemicals in the workplace and requires public employers to provide their employees with information and training concerning chemical hazards and controls. The federal OSHA Hazard Communication Standard, 1910.1200, requires private employers to provide similar training and information to their employees.

- * Exposure to hazardous substances should be routinely evaluated. This may include collecting personal and area air samples. You can obtain copies of sampling results from your employer. You have a legal right to this information under OSHA 1910.20.
- * If you think you are experiencing any work-related health problems, see a doctor trained to recognize occupational diseases. Take this Fact Sheet with you.

WORKPLACE EXPOSURE LIMITS

The following exposure limits are for *alkyl Mercury compounds* (measured as *Mercury*):

OSHA: The legal airborne permissible exposure limit (PEL) is **0.01 mg/m³** averaged over an 8-hour workshift and **0.04 mg/m³** not to be exceeded during any work period.

NIOSH: The recommended airborne exposure limit is **0.01 mg/m³** averaged over an 10-hour workshift and **0.03 mg/m³**, not to be exceeded during any 15 minute work period.

ACGIH: The recommended airborne exposure limit is **0.01 mg/m³** averaged over an 8-hour workshift and **0.03 mg/m³** as a STEL (short term exposure limit).

- * The above exposure limits are for air levels only. When skin contact also occurs, you may be overexposed, even though air levels are less than the limits listed above.

WAYS OF REDUCING EXPOSURE

- * Where possible, enclose operations and use local exhaust ventilation at the site of chemical release. If local exhaust ventilation or enclosure is not used, respirators should be worn.
- * Wear protective work clothing.
- * Wash thoroughly immediately after exposure to **Dimethyl Mercury** and at the end of the workshift.
- * Post hazard and warning information in the work area. In addition, as part of an ongoing education and training effort, communicate all information on the health and safety hazards of **Dimethyl Mercury** to potentially exposed workers.

This Fact Sheet is a summary source of information of all potential and most severe health hazards that may result from exposure. Duration of exposure, concentration of the substance and other factors will affect your susceptibility to any of the potential effects described below.

HEALTH HAZARD INFORMATION

Acute Health Effects

The following acute (short-term) health effects may occur immediately or shortly after exposure to **Dimethyl Mercury**:

- * Skin contact can cause severe irritation and burns. Symptoms are delayed for 6 to 8 hours with redness and, later blisters.
- * **Dimethyl Mercury** can severely irritate and burn the eyes.
- * Breathing **Dimethyl Mercury** can irritate the nose, throat and lungs with soreness, cough and shortness of breath.

Chronic Health Effects

The following chronic (long-term) health effects can occur at some time after exposure to **Dimethyl Mercury** and can last for months or years:

Cancer Hazard

- * According to the information presently available to the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services, **Dimethyl Mercury** has not been tested for its ability to cause cancer in animals.

Reproductive Hazard

- * While **Dimethyl Mercury** has not been tested for its ability to affect reproduction, it should be HANDLED WITH CAUTION since several related *Mercury compounds* are known teratogens in humans.

Other Long-Term Effects

- * **Dimethyl Mercury** can cause delayed, permanent brain damage and death with little or no warning.
- * Symptoms of brain or nerve damage include a tingling or "pins and needles" feeling in fingers, lips and tongue, clumsiness and weakness. Loss of vision is common with loss of ability to see to the side rather than in front (such as in reading, and can go unnoticed until it becomes severe. Slurred speech, reduced hearing, abnormal gait during walking, poor coordination, tremors ("shakes"), shaky handwriting and personality changes can also occur.
- * **Dimethyl Mercury** may damage the kidneys.
- * *Mercury* accumulates in the body with repeated exposure. It can take months or years for the body to get rid of excess *Mercury*.

MEDICAL

Medical Testing

Before first exposure, and every 6 to 12 months after, a complete medical history and exam is strongly recommended with:

- * Exam of the nervous system, including handwriting.
- * Visual exam, including "visual field" exam.
- * Hearing test.
- * Test for *Mercury* in hair and blood.

After suspected illness or overexposure, repeat these tests promptly, again in 4 to 6 weeks, and then as recommended by your doctor.

Any evaluation should include a careful history of past and present symptoms with an exam. Medical tests that look for damage already done are not a substitute for controlling exposure.

Request copies of your medical testing. You have a legal right to this information under OSHA 1910.20.

Mixed Exposures

- * Creams to whiten or bleach skin may contain *Mercury*; if so, their use increases risk. A high fish diet, especially of marine predatory (fish-eating) fish, may increase blood *Mercury*.

WORKPLACE CONTROLS AND PRACTICES

Unless a less toxic chemical can be substituted for a hazardous substance, **ENGINEERING CONTROLS** are the most effective way of reducing exposure. The best protection is to enclose operations and/or provide local exhaust ventilation at the site of chemical release. Isolating operations can also reduce exposure. Using respirators or protective equipment is less effective than the controls mentioned above, but is sometimes necessary.

In evaluating the controls present in your workplace, consider: (1) how hazardous the substance is, (2) how much of the substance is released into the workplace and (3) whether harmful skin or eye contact could occur. Special controls should be in place for highly toxic chemicals or when significant skin, eye, or breathing exposures are possible.

In addition, the following controls are recommended:

- * Where possible, automatically pump **Dimethyl Mercury** from drums or other storage containers to process containers.
- * Work surfaces should be cleaned thoroughly on a routine basis.

Good **WORK PRACTICES** can help to reduce hazardous exposures. The following work practices are recommended:

- * Workers whose clothing has been contaminated by **Dimethyl Mercury** should change into clean clothing promptly.
- * Do not take contaminated work clothes home. Family members could be exposed.
- * Contaminated work clothes should be laundered by individuals who have been informed of the hazards of exposure to **Dimethyl Mercury**.
- * Eye wash fountains should be provided in the immediate work area for emergency use.
- * If there is the possibility of skin exposure, emergency shower facilities should be provided.
- * On skin contact with **Dimethyl Mercury**, immediately wash or shower to remove the chemical. At the end of the workshift, wash any areas of the body that may have contacted **Dimethyl Mercury**, whether or not known skin contact has occurred.
- * Do not eat, smoke, or drink where **Dimethyl Mercury** is handled, processed, or stored, since the chemical can be swallowed. Wash hands carefully before eating or smoking.
- * For clean-up use a specialized charcoal-filtered vacuum or suction pump to avoid generating *Mercury vapor*. Care should be taken not to disturb spilled material.

PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT

WORKPLACE CONTROLS ARE BETTER THAN PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT. However, for some jobs (such as outside work, confined space entry, jobs done only once in a while, or jobs done while workplace controls are being installed), personal protective equipment may be appropriate.

OSHA 1910.132 requires employers to determine the appropriate personal protective equipment for each hazard and to train employees on how and when to use protective equipment.

The following recommendations are only guidelines and may not apply to every situation.

Clothing

- * Avoid skin contact with **Dimethyl Mercury**. Wear protective gloves and clothing. Safety equipment suppliers/manufacturers can provide recommendations on the most protective glove/clothing material for your operation.
- * All protective clothing (suits, gloves, footwear, headgear) should be clean, available each day and put on before work.
- * Non-absorbent materials are recommended.
- * There is no quantitative information available at the present time on what types of gloves or chemical protective clothing offer protection from permeation or degradation by *mercury* and its compounds.

Eye Protection

- * Wear splash-proof chemical goggles and face shield when working with liquid, unless full facepiece respiratory protection is worn.

Respiratory Protection

IMPROPER USE OF RESPIRATORS IS DANGEROUS.

Such equipment should only be used if the employer has a written program that takes into account workplace conditions, requirements for worker training, respirator fit testing and medical exams, as described in OSHA 1910.134.

- * Where the potential exists for exposure to **Dimethyl Mercury** over **0.01 mg/m³**, use a MSHA/NIOSH approved supplied-air respirator with a full facepiece operated in the continuous flow mode.
- * Exposure to **2 mg/m³** is immediately dangerous to life and health. If the possibility of exposure above **2 mg/m³** exists, use a MSHA/NIOSH approved self-contained breathing apparatus with a full facepiece operated in pressure-demand or other positive pressure mode.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

- Q: If I have acute health effects, will I later get chronic health effects?
- A: Not always. Most chronic (long-term) effects result from repeated exposures to a chemical.
- Q: Can I get long-term effects without ever having short-term effects?
- A: Yes, because long-term effects can occur from repeated exposures to a chemical at levels not high enough to make you immediately sick.
- Q: What are my chances of getting sick when I have been exposed to chemicals?
- A: The likelihood of becoming sick from chemicals is increased as the amount of exposure increases. This is determined by the length of time and the amount of material to which someone is exposed.
- Q: When are higher exposures more likely?
- A: Conditions which increase risk of exposure include physical and mechanical processes (heating, pouring, spraying, spills and evaporation from large surface areas such as open containers), and "confined space" exposures (working inside vats, reactors, boilers, small rooms, etc.).
- Q: Is the risk of getting sick higher for workers than for community residents?
- A: Yes. Exposures in the community, except possibly in cases of fires or spills, are usually much lower than those found in the workplace. However, people in the community may be exposed to contaminated water as well as to chemicals in the air over long periods. Because of this, and because of exposure of children or people who are already ill, community exposures may cause health problems.

- Q: Should I be concerned if a chemical is a teratogen in animals?
- A: Yes. Although some chemicals may affect humans differently than they affect animals, damage to animals suggests that similar damage can occur in humans.

The following information is available from:

New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services
Occupational Disease and Injury Services
PO Box 360
Trenton, NJ 08625-0360
(609) 984-1863
(609) 292-5677 (fax)

Web address: <http://www.state.nj.us/health/eoh/odisweb/>

Industrial Hygiene Information

Industrial hygienists are available to answer your questions regarding the control of chemical exposures using exhaust ventilation, special work practices, good housekeeping, good hygiene practices, and personal protective equipment including respirators. In addition, they can help to interpret the results of industrial hygiene survey data.

Medical Evaluation

If you think you are becoming sick because of exposure to chemicals at your workplace, you may call personnel at the Department of Health and Senior Services, Occupational Disease and Injury Services, who can help you find the information you need.

Public Presentations

Presentations and educational programs on occupational health or the Right to Know Act can be organized for labor unions, trade associations and other groups.

Right to Know Information Resources

The Right to Know Infoline (609) 984-2202 can answer questions about the identity and potential health effects of chemicals, list of educational materials in occupational health, references used to prepare the Fact Sheets, preparation of the Right to Know survey, education and training programs, labeling requirements, and general information regarding the Right to Know Act. Violations of the law should be reported to (609) 984-2202.

DEFINITIONS

ACGIH is the American Conference of Governmental Industrial Hygienists. It recommends upper limits (called TLVs) for exposure to workplace chemicals.

A **carcinogen** is a substance that causes cancer.

The **CAS number** is assigned by the Chemical Abstracts Service to identify a specific chemical.

A **combustible** substance is a solid, liquid or gas that will burn.

A **corrosive** substance is a gas, liquid or solid that causes irreversible damage to human tissue or containers.

DEP is the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection.

DOT is the Department of Transportation, the federal agency that regulates the transportation of chemicals.

EPA is the Environmental Protection Agency, the federal agency responsible for regulating environmental hazards.

A **fetus** is an unborn human or animal.

A **flammable** substance is a solid, liquid, vapor or gas that will ignite easily and burn rapidly.

The **flash point** is the temperature at which a liquid or solid gives off vapor that can form a flammable mixture with air.

HHAG is the Human Health Assessment Group of the federal EPA.

IARC is the International Agency for Research on Cancer, a scientific group that classifies chemicals according to their cancer-causing potential.

A **miscible** substance is a liquid or gas that will evenly dissolve in another.

mg/m³ means milligrams of a chemical in a cubic meter of air. It is a measure of concentration (weight/volume).

MSHA is the Mine Safety and Health Administration, the federal agency that regulates mining. It also evaluates and approves respirators.

A **mutagen** is a substance that causes mutations. A **mutation** is a change in the genetic material in a body cell. Mutations can lead to birth defects, miscarriages, or cancer.

NAERG is the North American Emergency Response Guidebook. It was jointly developed by Transport Canada, the United States Department of Transportation and the Secretariat of Communications and Transportation of Mexico. It is a guide for first responders to quickly identify the specific or generic hazards of material involved in a transportation incident, and to protect themselves and the general public during the initial response phase of the incident.

NCI is the National Cancer Institute, a federal agency that determines the cancer-causing potential of chemicals.

NFPA is the National Fire Protection Association. It classifies substances according to their fire and explosion hazard.

NIOSH is the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health. It tests equipment, evaluates and approves respirators, conducts studies of workplace hazards, and proposes standards to OSHA.

NTP is the National Toxicology Program which tests chemicals and reviews evidence for cancer.

OSHA is the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, which adopts and enforces health and safety standards.

PEOSHA is the Public Employees Occupational Safety and Health Act, a state law which sets PELs for New Jersey public employees.

ppm means parts of a substance per million parts of air. It is a measure of concentration by volume in air.

A **reactive** substance is a solid, liquid or gas that releases energy under certain conditions.

A **teratogen** is a substance that causes birth defects by damaging the fetus.

TLV is the Threshold Limit Value, the workplace exposure limit recommended by ACGIH.

The **vapor pressure** is a measure of how readily a liquid or a solid mixes with air at its surface. A higher vapor pressure indicates a higher concentration of the substance in air and therefore increases the likelihood of breathing it in.

HANDLING AND STORAGE

- * Prior to working with **Dimethyl Mercury** you should be trained on its proper handling and storage.
- * Store in tightly closed containers in a cool, well-ventilated area away from **OXIDIZERS** (such as **PERCHLORATES**, **PEROXIDES**, **PERMANGANATES**, **CHLORATES** and **NITRATES**).

FIRST AID

In NJ, POISON INFORMATION 1-800-764-7661

- ## Eye Contact

- * Immediately flush with large amounts of water for at least 15 minutes, occasionally lifting upper and lower lids. Seek medical attention.

Skin Contact

* Quickly remove contaminated clothing. Immediately wash contaminated skin with large amounts of soap and water.

- ## Breathing

- * Remove the person from exposure.
- * Begin rescue breathing if breathing has stopped and CPR if heart action has stopped.
- * Transfer promptly to a medical facility.

Water Solubility: Insoluble

OTHER COMMONLY USED NAMES

Chemical Name:
Mercury, Dimethyl-

Not intended to be copied and sold for commercial purposes.

NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND
SENIOR SERVICES

Right to Know Program

PO Box 368, Trenton, NJ 08625-0368
(609) 984-2202

CHEMTREC: (800) 424-9300
NJDEP HOTLINE: (609) 292-7172